

Basic Guidelines for the Design of Print Materials

Below are some tips regarding the design of your materials. It is important to remember that there is significant disagreement among graphic designers about what constitutes good design. A graphic designer that you work with is likely to have their own style, which may or may not coincide with the following suggestions.

Remember: materials produced by Public Health – Seattle & King County must follow our [graphics standards guidelines](#).

Tips for accommodating the disabled

The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that materials printed by Public Health – Seattle & King County be available, upon request, to a person with a disability. Programs must make a good faith effort to provide materials in alternative formats. All educational materials printed by Public Health – Seattle & King County must include the following statement:

To request this publication in an alternative format, please call (contact number here).

The most common alternative formats requested are “large print”, braille, or audiotape. In other words, you would provide the text in at least 18-point type, written in braille, or recorded on cassette tape.

Before you draft a meeting notice, brochure, newsletter or other print document, check <http://kcweb/dias/ocre/checklist.htm>. The site provides information to help make your print materials more accessible to people with disabilities. For further questions, please contact Communication Manager Mark Alstead at mark.alstead@metrokc.gov or 206-1143.

General Design Tips

Graphics

- Keep graphics simple and uncluttered.
- Graphics should be immediately identifiable and relevant to the subject matter and reader.
- Graphics should reinforce, not compete with the text.
- Anything located in the upper left quadrant (the primary optical area) of a layout has more optical weight than anything located anywhere else.
- Rectangles are “usual” shapes. Everything else (triangles, ovals, circles, elliptical shapes, cubes, etc) conveys optical weight.
- It is difficult to read at an angle—but a graphic may be slanted.
- Government offices are good sources for low-cost or free images. Consider the following: The National Archives and Records Services, The Library of Congress, The National Park Service, NASA, Chambers of commerce, and state and local offices of tourism.

Use of Space

- Use 15% minimum white space.
- Use white space as a design element that changes from spread to spread. Vary the amount of white space to create interest on your spreads, just as you would vary the sizes of photographs to create interest.

Placement and Form of Text

- Break up text with visuals placed to emphasize key points. Some text can be used as “bullets.” Titles or subtitles reinforce important points.
- Avoid justified right margins. Justified text in general is often difficult to read.
- In a long document, break the grid to avoid reader boredom.
- Keep line lengths eye-manageable. Unless it is the headline, avoid using less than five words per line of text.
- Use captions when appropriate—surveys show people prefer to read captions (even long) over articles (even short).
- Use “pull-quotes” in longer pieces.

- Avoid unnecessary punctuation like parentheses or brackets.

Photos

- Put photos slightly off-center.
- Use a photo of someone looking off the page to get someone to turn the page.

Tables and graphs

- Clearly label all of your tables and graphs, and indicate units of measurement.
- If a table has more than four rows, shade every other row to make it easier for the reader to scan horizontally across the table.

Cover tips

- Goal is to get attention, convey an image or mood to get the reader involved.
- Headline/title should be 9-15 words only – keep in mind that you have, at the very most, 7 seconds to attract the reader to the document.
- Words to use: Free, How to, You, Your.
- Before/After images work well—but test for cultural understanding, because some readers don't read from left to right.
- Highlight benefits in unique ways (“11½ reasons you should wear your bike helmet”).
- Question & Answer is a good brochure form because skimmers can read what they want and avid readers can read it all. Use a different font for the questions and answers.
- The brochure's title should be readable in a brochure kiosk.

Tips regarding fonts

- No more than two per publication.
- Any sentences over ten words are significantly less likely to be read if they're in italics, caps, script, bold, light, condensed, or expanded.
- Serifed fonts, such as Times New Roman, are more legible and accurately read. They have a conservative, nostalgic feel.
- Sans-serif fonts, such as Arial, are quicker to read and have a more modern feel.
- Light and ultra-bold are hard to read.

- Avoid using type smaller than 10 point.
- Avoid using all capitals.
- Reverse type can be hard to read— if you use it, select a larger font size. Be sure there is at least a 70% difference in tonal value between the type and the background.

Suggested Use of Font Elements

	Body Text		Captions
Font	Sans-serif	Serif	Serif or sans-serif
Size	Subheadings: minimum of 2 pts. larger than body copy Headings: minimum of 2X larger than subheads	9-12 pt	If serif, 2 pts larger than body text or 1 pt smaller If sans serif, same as body text
Weight	Bold type	Regular type	Bold type

Tips for using colors

Characteristics of Popular Colors

- Red: moves to action, raises blood pressure, increases taste bud activity
- Yellow: mentally stimulating, promotes feelings of cheerfulness/happiness
- Orange: affordable, cheap
- Blue: higher memory recall, quicker healing, dark blue is the only color that is not threatening to any culture
- Green: healthy, environmentally conscious
- Purple: spirituality or religion, transformation, creating change

Shading and Intensity

- Use clear, bright colors for the information-bearing parts of your design and more subtle shades for the background
- Color has more optical weight (getting readers' attention) than black and white

- Elements that are dark carry more optical weight than elements that are light
- If you have to limit yourself to one color other than black, red is highly visible and works well in all its different shades

Color Associations

- Use color to identify repeating elements of your design, so readers associate a certain color with a certain kind of information.
- Be consistent. If you use gold to signify dollars in a graph on page one, don't use green for dollars on page three.

Other Color Tips

- To find out which colors are trendy, look to advertising that targets your audience, or go to a store, such as Pottery Barn, which will have the latest colors in stock
- Photos should be in black or brown only
- To make inexpensive colored images, try hand-coloring and scanning clip art
- Limit the number of colors you use
- Avoid having red/blue/green touching one another